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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 JEDDAH 000389

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TAGS: KISL PREL SA SCUL

SUBJECT: MOSQUE SERMONS FROM SAUDI ARABIA, MAY 19: EASTERN
IMAM RAILS AGAINST WOMEN'S LIBERATION AND CRUSADERS IN
ARABIA; WESTERN IMAMS CALL FOR SUPPORT FOR STUDENTS AND
TRUST IN GOD

Classified By: Acting Consul General Hector Morales, for
reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

FROM THE EASTERN PROVINCE: FULMINATIONS AGAINST THE MODERN
WORLD AND ESPECIALLY WOMEN'S RIGHTS

¶1. (C) On May 19, Sahikh Mohammad al-Qahtani spoke at the Imam Ahmad bin Habal Mosque in al-Khobar to a congregation of more than 500 worshippers. NOTE: In the opinion of our source, this was one of the strongest sermons the imam has delivered. It was Saudi-specific, and the imam explicitly condemned powerful Saudi figures, including Prince al-Waleed bin Talal, Lubna Olayan and others, whom the religious right considers liberal or secular. The imam's criticisms extended to the government and the establishment, and, in the opinion of the source, may land him in trouble with the authorities. His most extreme criticism was his condemnation of the Saudi government for inviting American and allied troops to protect Saudi Arabia against Saddam's threats in 1990. END NOTE.

¶2. (C) As is the imam's custom, his sermon started off quietly, with an indictment of those who would "commercialize the Shari'ah," "Some people," he complained, "use Islamic Shari'ah as cover for other 'worldly' purposes, whether it's to market something or is an attempt to legitimize an action or a decision."

INDICTMENT OF WOMEN'S LIBERATION

¶3. (C) His rhetoric quickly escalated as he denounced newspapers, and especially satellite television for running stories and airing programs under the pretext of "women's liberation." According to the imam, these did the opposite and damaged the image of women and their place in the community. He exclaimed that "They" have been trying very hard to sow discord among Muslim communities. He traced the trend back to the women's liberation movement in Egypt in 1919 and connected it to the spread of communism and socialism in later decades. He denounced several Egyptian writers from the 1950's through the 1970's who had written books advocating women's liberation.

DENUNCIATION OF GOVERNMENT FOR ADMITTING CRUSADERS

¶4. (C) Then his diatribe reached its peak as he announced the cause for this iniquitous state. "Fifteen years ago,

this was a country where men would never dare organize a demonstration or even squeak a word for fear of being arrested, yet a group of women managed it. You know why? The very presence of the crusader army on the Land of the Two Holy Mosques acted as a catalyst. It helped give the women newly found courage, which they never had. No doubt, others were also behind those women. These women showed defiance and contempt. They got behind the wheels of cars that had been left for them and drove on the streets of our capital city as if it's the normal thing to do!"

WICKEDNESS IN SAUDI ARABIA

15. (C) "Now," he went on, "we have people who brag about the first Saudi woman pilot, the first Saudi woman rally driver, and so on. The pilot's photo meeting her benefactor was published across the pages of Saudi papers for all to see, and the rally driver was featured in a TV program. How do we know what the pilot will be doing when she travels abroad in the company of total strangers? The list goes on. There are people who encourage women to participate in conferences and meetings. Let's take the example of economic conferences. Can you explain to me why is it the conference is held in Europe when it should have been held here where the economy is? How about the increasing number of Saudi women who leave their abayas behind and appear in public, even on TV for all to see! Is this what they want? Or what we want? I recall a statement Mr. Abd al-Rahman al-Jeraisy (Head of the Riyadh Chamber of Commerce) made after one of these conferences, when he described the conference more like a women's fashion show! If they are concerned about women's issues, why don't they stand up and defend older women, widows and divorcees? These are the women who need protection. If that is not enough, we have women appearing in public with make-up on

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their faces! Why is it a woman TV hostess spends three hours on make-up when her program is actually a few minutes long? Look at negative attitude toward the Committee for the Promotion of Virtue and the Prevention of Vice. They paint negative pictures about them. It is disgusting."

PUTTING PROFIT BEFORE THE PROPHET

16. (C) The imam concluded with another attack against those he accused of using the Shari'ah too liberally. "How do you know," he announced, "the meat you buy is halal (Prepared in compliance with Islamic requirements.) even though it's properly labeled in accordance with Islamic Shari'ah? The word is that \$50.00 a head will get you the label but not necessarily the halal meat, and this is what some Muslims are doing in Europe. Everything is labeled correctly but the service or the product itself are far from being Islamic."

FROM MECCA: IMPORTANCE OF EDUCATION AND SUPPORT FOR HARRIED STUDENTS

17. (U) At the time when Saudi students are facing the ordeal of final examinations, Shaykh Salih Al Talib, preaching from the Holy Mosque in Mecca, devoted his sermon to education. He proclaimed that education was important to all nations and final exams were an important matter for students. He warned students, rather belatedly, that they should study hard from the first day of class and not wait until the time for examinations was upon them. He also cautioned against fatigue from late night studying and taking stimulants. Showing compassion, he comforted anxious students by saying exams are not the end of the world. It is possible to recover from failure. "Students should see examinations," he said, "as an opportunity to excel and do their best."

ROLE OF GOD IN EDUCATION

18. (U) The imam's second sermon was similar to the first. He told the congregation: "Exams are an opportunity for the serious ones to train themselves and their children and to

establish a link with God Almighty by resorting to Him and showing the need for Him. No matter how smart a student is, he needs success from God Almighty." He ended with a prayer beseeching God's assistance for students.

FROM MEDINA: FEAR GOD AND PLACE TRUST IN HIM

¶6. At the Prophet's Mosque in Medina on May 19, Shaykh Abd-al-Mushsin Bin-Muhammad al-Qasim offered a lesson without a specific target, simply admonishing the worshipers to "fear God and the punishment of those who disobey God." His second sermon reprised the homily, assuring those present that: "Whoever fears God, no one harms him. And whoever fears any other, no one benefits him. Surrendering to God and placing trust in Him, removes fear from human beings." He concluded with the usual prayer: "God, support Islam and Muslims, humble non-belief and unbelievers, destroy the enemies of religion, and make this and other Muslim countries safe and secure."

Morales